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L E T T E R I.

DEAR SIR,

IT has given me great satisfaction to find that you are elected a member of the new Parliament. That persons of an independant fortune, and who have been at pains to improve the advantages of a liberal education, should early acquire a knowledge of our Constitution, and take an active part in the government, is devoutly to be wished by every lover of his country. Give me leave to say, that your promising abilities, and the spirit you have hitherto discovered, encourage me to hope that, in the situation in which you are now placed, your conduct will be such as to reflect

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honor upon yourself and your connections. You are, indeed, beginning your political career at a very critical period ; when the proceedings of Parliament are likely to draw the attention of all Europe, and when its resolutions will not only ascertain decisively the character of its members, but probably determine the fate of a Constitution, which has long been the boast of Englishmen, as well as the admiration and envy of their neighbours. The desire you express of knowing my opinion, concerning the state of our public affairs, is highly flattering to me ; and I shall take the liberty of communicating, without reserve, such thoughts as I am unable to suppress on the present alarming crisis.

In order to form a right judgment of the several questions which are now likely to be agitated, it seems necessary that you should take a retrospective view of the public occurrences for several months past, and examine the course of events which has led to the dissolution of the former, and given birth to the present Parliament. Permit me, therefore, to recall to your memory a few of those particulars, from which the conduct of the different parties, the principles upon which they have acted, and the designs which they are prosecuting, will appear in the fullest light.

In a review of this kind, the extraordinary circumstances attending the late change of Ministry,

as they afford a key to the succeeding transactions, appear to demand your first attention. The interference of the Crown, with all its weight, to influence the determination of an important question then depending in the House of Peers, was undoubtedly an unconstitutional measure of the first magnitude. The vehement manner in which this was executed, the direct and even threatening intimation that was given concerning the inclinations of Majesty, leave no doubt about the intention of the measure: The success which attended it, renders its consequences truly alarming.

That the King, during the dependance of a bill, shall not take notice of the proceedings of either House, is a maxim obviously founded upon the separate departments belonging to the different branches of the Legislature, and which is manifestly essential to the freedom of debate, and to the independance of Parliament. There is accordingly no point, with respect to which parliament has been more watchful of its privileges, or has discovered greater jealousy of whatever might have the appearance of the least encroachment upon the part of the Crown*. The flagrant violation of

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parliamentary

* See the proceedings of the House of Commons collected by Hatfield. This author mentions two exceptions to the maxim above-mentioned. The first where the King is interested

parliamentary privileges, in this particular, has always been regarded as an indelible stain upon the otherwise fortunate and glorious reign of Queen Elizabeth : And it was a measure of the same sort which marked, in strong characters, the dissimulation and tyrannical principles of the infatuated Charles the First.

I fancy you will agree with me in thinking, that the appointment of the present Ministers was not so properly a *consequence*, as it was a *part* of the late transaction which I have mentioned. There can be no doubt that the whole plan was laid with their advice and concurrence ; that they approved of it in all its branches, and that their coming into office, was a necessary and preconcerted link in the scheme. It cannot therefore be denied, that they are responsible for this, as well as for every succeeding measure of the Crown.

The resolutions of the House of Commons, which followed this transaction, were such as the circumstances of the case loudly demanded. Had the representatives of the nation allowed themselves to wink at such extraordinary proceedings, or passed them over in silence, they would have been justly considered as callous to every insult upon

interested as a party, having a pecuniary interest. The second, on applications for public money. It will not, surely, be pretended that the late interference of the Crown, falls within either of these exceptions.

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their own dignity, as betraying the trust reposed in them by their Constituents, and as tamely abandoning the most important rights of the people.

It was not possible, at the same time, to condemn these proceedings, without censuring the persons who had been chiefly instrumental in the execution of them. It was not possible to condemn the crime, and with the same breath to approve of the criminal ; far less to cherish and reward him, or to employ him in those important departments which require the highest national confidence.

The strong censures expressed by the House of Commons against the advisers of this measure, and the repeated addresses which they carried to the Throne, for the removal of the present Ministry, have given rise to a question the most important, perhaps, of any that can be agitated with respect to the British Constitution. That the Crown has the sole right of naming its Ministers, is indisputable. But is this right to be exercised, in all cases, without any sort of limitation or controul? Is it not necessary that Ministers shall have the confidence of Parliament ? in particular, that they shall have the confidence of the House of Commons by whom the supplies are granted, and committed to the immediate direction of Ministry ? And if the Representatives of the nation shall entertain a suspicion, from whatever cause, of the persons appointed by the Crown for that purpose, and shall

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think them unfit for the trust committed to them, is it not the duty of the executive power to remove them from their offices? This is a question which every Englishman ought seriously to consider; as it involves, not the interest of this or that political party, but the dearest and most important rights of the nation. The determination of this point appears to me to decide, whether we are to remain in the condition of a free people, or to be reduced under an absolute government.

According to the system of government established at the Revolution, by which a proper line was drawn between the prerogative of the Crown, and the privileges of the People, the Legislative power, including that of imposing taxes, was vested in the three branches of parliament; and it was understood that, in conformity to the ancient Constitution, the particular share of the Legislature, committed to the Crown, should be exercised, in the way of a *negative* only, to such bills as might be passed in the two Houses. Such was the distribution of the pre-eminent and controuling power in the State, which, at that glorious æra of our history, received the sanction of public authority, and was intended to remain inviolable to future ages. The settlement, which was made at that period, is to be considered as the great standard, for ascertaining the nature of our limited monarchy. It is the fixed star which we, of this island,

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ought never to lose sight of in all the mazes of political speculation. The rights of the Sovereign and of the people were then balanced with such peculiar propriety, that no superiority of power could afterwards be acquired by either party, without being fatal to that mixed form of government which it had been the general intention to secure.

The natural course of things, however, and the almost unavoidable modes of conducting public business, have, since that period, produced considerable deviations from the strict form of the Revolution settlement: but these deviations have been invariably of such a nature as to preserve the spirit and the essence of that happy establishment. If any new powers have been assumed by one party, which might seem an encroachment upon the rights of the other, these have been counterbalanced by a direktion of other powers, or by the exercise of privileges upon the other side, from which the general equilibrium has been maintained, and the system of our liberties has remained upon its former basis.

Thus the unquestionable prerogative of refusing the Royal assent to bills which have passed the two Houses of Parliament, appears to be in a great measure relinquished; since only one instance of its exertion is to be found from the period above-mentioned; that is, during the course
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of near a century. On the other hand, the Crown has, during the same course of time, been accustomed to the regular exercise of another branch of power, in reality of much greater consequence; that of *introducing*, by its Ministers, the greater part of bills which come under the deliberation of Parliament. It is now regarded as a singularity, when debates of a public nature, and in matters of importance, originate from a different quarter. In place of a mere negative, in the last instance, upon the resolutions of that assembly, the Crown has thus acquired the means of suggesting every subject of deliberation. Instead of interposing a restraint upon any innovation, it has in this manner become the prime mover of new regulations. From furnishing merely the ballast, it now fills the sails of the vessel.

This however is not the only alteration which time has introduced in the partition of the great powers of government. It is well known that in ordinary cases, the ministry are accustomed, not only to *bring in*, but to *carry through*, those bills which are agreeable to the wishes of the Crown. The influence derived from the management of the public revenue, and from the various expedients in the hands of the Crown, is such as commonly to secure the success of every new regulation proposed by the Court, and to
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render the public deliberation little more than a matter of form. There are seldom wanting, indeed, combinations of individuals, who endeavour to oppose the measures of Administration ; but the efforts of those men, in ordinary situations, have usually no other consequence than to afford the entertainment of a debate, or at most to occasion a little delay of the business. That this is the real state of the matter, is acknowledged by all the world ; and while we reason upon the nature of the British Government, we are forced to admit that its operations, in this particular, are by no means performed according to those general principles upon which the political machine has been constructed.

If what I have now observed were to hold universally, if the influence of the Crown were, in all cases, to over-rule the determinations of Parliament, it is evident that our liberties would be at an end ; and that, so far from maintaining the principles of the Revolution settlement, we should be unquestionably under the absolute dominion of a single person. But in this, as in many other instances which occur in the history of the English government, a remedy has been quickly provided, capable of stopping the progress at least, if not of completely curing the disorder. From the very circumstances which produced this irregular exertion of Crown-influence,

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there has arisen a method of controuling and limiting the extent of it, from which its dangerous consequences appear to be in a great measure removed. Though, from the concurrence of ordinary causes, the national assembly is commonly induced to follow the guidance of ministry, yet in peculiar circumstances a different disposition may prevail; and the conduct of particular Ministers may be so absurd, or of such a hurtful tendency, as to excite indignation and resentment, or to create a general distrust of their intentions. In such a situation, it seems to be the duty, as it is likely to be the inclination of Parliament, not only to reject with violence the measures which have been presented to their consideration, but even to require the dismissal of those Ministers who have incurred their displeasure. To carry their views into execution, the House of Commons may refuse the supplies, and by suspending the operations of Government, render it necessary for the Crown to comply with their request.

If Parliament, on these extraordinary occasions, were only to refuse its concurrence to particular measures, allowing the Ministers to remain office, such a feeble testimony of its displeasure would be of little consequence. It would be of no avail in preventing ministry from acquiring the entire direction of parliamentary business. It would
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only teach them to change their ground, and to vary their method of attack; or to wait for particular conjunctures in order to accomplish a favourite measure. As the situations when a majority in either House can be formed in opposition to Administration occur but seldom, they must be employed, as often as they do occur, for the purpose of restraining effectually the improper exertions of the executive power. They must be considered equally in the light of a check to the past, and of an example to the future. To render the servants of the Crown cautious of abusing that extraordinary influence of which they are possessed, they must be convinced that it is impossible for them to retain their stations any longer than while they maintain the approbation and good opinion of Parliament. In short, as the Crown has manifestly encroached upon the free exercise of the Legislature, it is necessary that the legislative body, in order to preserve its independence, should make a corresponding extension of its privileges; and as Parliament submits in ordinary cases to be directed by Administration, the ministry ought on the other hand to possess the confidence of Parliament, and to be removed whenever they fall into a contrary situation. It is in this manner only, that the exertions of prerogative which I have mentioned, can be rendered consistent with any rational plan for secur-

ing the liberties of the people; and that the ancient balance of the constitution, notwithstanding the various materials which have been accidentally thrown into either scale, can in reality be maintained.

The right of Parliament, and in particular the right of the House of Commons, to procure, by an Address to the Crown, the removal of particular Ministers, seems, accordingly, to have been established ever since the Revolution. This is the doctrine that runs through the whole course of our Parliamentary Debates, and which has never been controverted, even by those whose interest it was to hold the opposite opinion. Not a single instance occurs, during that period, in which the desire of the House of Commons in this respect has not been complied with; and in most cases, when a Minister has foreseen that an application of this kind was likely to be made against him, he has thought proper to retire, in order to avoid the effects of it. Even in the earlier periods of our history, we find the Parliament claiming the same privilege, though they had not so strong a plea to urge in support of it. The best and wisest of our monarchs appear, at all times, to have thought it incumbent on them to remove such Ministers as had incurred the distrust and jealousy of that assembly; and those who followed a different course, had, for the most part,

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occasion to repent of their indiscretion. Of the last, the melancholy catastrophe of Edward the Second, and of Richard the Second, and above all the unfortunate reigns of the House of Stewart, are memorable examples.

It has been said that the Addressees of the late House of Commons, in order to procure attention from the Throne, ought to have specified some particular misconduct in Ministers; and that the bare expression of their disapprobation, or want of confidence, was not sufficient to entitle them to a compliance with their request. According to my view, the reason specified in the repeated Resolutions of that House, appears the strongest that can possibly be assigned; an unconstitutional measure of which those Ministers have been guilty in the very act which gave rise to their appointment. Does not this tend to excite stronger suspicions against their political integrity, and show more clearly that they are unfit to continue in their offices, than if they had merely committed a mistake in the conduct of a war, or had been deceived with respect to the productiveness or popularity of any particular tax, or had fallen into any of those errors which are usually insisted upon to justify an Address for the removal of ministry?

I cannot help thinking, however, that the argument carries us a good deal farther. It appears

to me that the House of Commons have peculiarly a right to demand the removal of Ministers, without assigning any specific reason whatever. As the House of Commons are entrusted by the nation at large with the power of granting supplies, so it is their duty to attend, not only to the propriety of the taxes imposed, but also to the proper application of the money which is levied; and upon this account they ought, undoubtedly, to be satisfied of the integrity and abilities of those persons to whom the disposal of the public revenue is committed. They may often be convinced, however, that particular persons are not qualified for such a trust, and yet be unable to charge them with any specific crime or mismanagement. The unsuitness of any person for an employment of so great difficulty and importance may often become evident before he has taken a single step in the execution of that employment. Is it necessary in such a case, to suffer the actual mismanagement of the public business, and to incur the hazard of all the evils which may arise from folly or wickedness, before a remedy shall be provided?

But what I would chiefly observe upon this head is, that if the Commons are obliged to specify a reason for demanding a change in Administration, their privilege in this respect will be of

no value; as it will afford no check to the improper appointment of Ministers. If it is held necessary to assign a specific charge, in order to procure the dismissal of Ministry, it will follow, that what is alledged against them must be of sufficient weight; for a weak or frivolous charge ought certainly to be as little regarded as no charge at all. But who is to judge of the strength or weakness of the reasons which are assigned in such cases? Is it the Crown? That will be the same thing as to commit the determination of the point to the very Ministry themselves, whose removal is proposed. An altercation, therefore, between them and the House of Commons; a paper war, in which the former will endeavour to justify their conduct, and the latter to represent it as unjustifiable, is all that can be expected upon such a plan, whenever the Crown is disposed to support the appointment of its Ministers. It were better to abolish at once this privilege of the Commons, than to make the people place any dependance upon such a mere shadow of security against the encroachment of prerogative.

From what has now been suggested, you will be able to judge of the opinion which, I see, has been of late maintained by Dr. Tucker: that the only constitutional mode of removing our Ministers is by an *impeachment*. I shall only add, that the Doctor appears not to have duly considered

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the small prospect of success in impeaching Ministers who remain in the plenitude of their power; that he has given no attention to the difficulty of proving, in a court of justice, those crimes which, to the conviction of all the world, may have really been committed by Ministry; and that he has totally overlooked the necessity, which may frequently occur, of removing a Minister, on account of his incapacity, his prejudices, or his pernicious principles, when he has done nothing that could, with propriety, be made the subject of an impeachment*. The Athenians were so sensible of the inconveniences attending the impeachment of men high in office, that the people were permitted without any trial to pass a vote of banishment upon any person, how innocent soever, who had
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* This author has often delivered his opinion upon public measures; and his opinions are almost as various as the administrations during which he has written. He was once of opinion, that our exclusive trade with America was hurtful to the nation, and that, in sound policy, it ought to be relinquished. Upon another occasion, however, he thought proper to justify the American war, upon this principle, that we had a *right* to subdue the Americans. Public measures, it seems, may be *legal*, which are destructive to the community. Change of circumstances may, perhaps, at some future period, induce the Doctor to maintain, that though impeachment is the only *legal* method of removing Ministry, yet an address to the Crown is the more *expedient* one.

excited their jealousy, and was accounted a dangerous member of the community.

The considerations which I have laid before you, are such as can hardly fail, I should think, to arise in the mind of every person, who has had an opportunity of observing our late Parliamentary transactions. You will recollect, however, that the reflections, which we have generally met with upon that subject, and the views which have been held up in most companies, are of a very different nature. The fact is, that instead of bringing forward the great constitutional question abovementioned to the examination of the people, the utmost pains have been taken to keep it entirely from their view; those events, by which our system of government appears to be deeply affected, have been regarded in no other light, than as they tend to promote the interest of different individuals; and the attention of the public, during the present alarming and critical period, has been artfully diverted to such particular circumstances, in the conduct of the late Ministry, as were calculated to excite popular clamour against them. The chief topics of declamation which have been employed for this purpose, and which appeared, for some time, to engross the attention of different sets of people, were the *Receipt-Tax*, the *Coalition*, and the *India-Bill*. Concerning each of these, as the subject has been

much canvassed, it will not be difficult for you to form a decisive opinion.

With regard to the *Receipt Tax*, it is natural to expect, that after our taxes have been screwed up to so high a pitch, the great body of the people, who are more governed by their feelings than by reflection, and who, by their situation, are prevented from discovering the necessities of government, as well as the difficulty of procuring Ways and Means, should be disgusted with a new exaction, which appears to fall indiscriminately upon a multitude of people of the lower rank, and is likely to stare them in the face, in the numberless petty transactions in which they are engaged. The propriety, however, and efficiency of this tax, notwithstanding any inconveniencies which were apprehended from it, appear now to be admitted on all hands ; and it has accordingly been voted for, and supported by both parties.—

The date of this topic of clamour is now over ; and the only circumstance relating to it, that seems worthy of remark, is the uncandid behaviour of that Minister of Finance, who, at the same time that he approved of the measure, was disengenuous enough to conceal his sentiments, and permitted his adherents to make the introduction of this tax a handle for casting odium and abuse upon the late Ministry.

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The coalition between Lord North and Mr. Fox has been the subject of so much discussion, that I would not wish to tire you with any observations upon it, farther than as it has been used by the opposite party, to excite popular clamour against the persons concerned in that transaction.

When this coalition was first announced to the public, it no doubt excited a good deal of surprise in the nation. The American war had given rise to two great parties, who approved or who disapproved of that measure; and these were animated with much keenness and resentment against those persons by whom the success of that war appeared to be chiefly promoted or opposed;—when the American war came to an end, the sourness and bad humour, contracted by the late ferment, were not immediately removed; and the different parties were still eager to gratify their prevailing passions, by humbling the respective leaders of the opposite side. How severe and mortifying the disappointment therefore, when Lord North and Mr. Fox, instead of suffering that disgrace which the enemies of either had been treasuring up for them, were brought immediately into power, and became members of a joint Administration.

The altercation at the same time, which had taken place betwixt those different leaders, had been managed with uncommon warmth; and the opposition of their sentiments had been remark-

ably pointed. The nation seemed, upon that account, to suppose, that the public divisions between those two persons were to become the source of a private quarrel, and that the acrimony of particular expressions which had escaped them in the heat and violence of debate, was to rankle in their bosoms, and to produce a rooted personal animosity. But when we reflect upon this matter with coolness and impartiality, it surely must be acknowledged, that there was no good ground for entertaining such an opinion. Those who are the fondest of the British Constitution, will, perhaps, be willing to admit, that the keenness of debate in Parliament which it occasions, and the severity of censure which it encourages against Administration, is a small inconvenience which we derive from our happy form of government. It is a sort of tax upon good manners, which Englishmen ought to consider as the price of their freedom. But persons who are much conversant in Parliamentary debate, learn to estimate the expressions used on such occasions at their just rate. They make allowance for the intention of the Speaker; and they acknowledge the distinction, according to Parliamentary language, between the imputations thrown upon political conduct, and those which have a reference to private character. Indeed, without such a distinction, it would be impossible to sift, and bring to
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light, the conduct of Administration in such a manner as the interest of the public seems to require.

In any other view than what is suggested by the supposition of private resentment between those two persons, or between their respective adherents, their union, so far from deserving censure, appears to merit approbation. In the circumstances in which the coalition was made, this, or some other agreement, equally liable to objection, was necessary for carrying on the business of the nation.

The House of Commons was at that time divided into three great parties, who had been distinguished by their opposite opinions upon several very important subjects; and these parties were so equally balanced, that no one of them was capable, by itself, of executing public measures. Without a coalition between two of them, it was impossible to give consistency and dignity to the national conduct, by forming a strong and efficient Administration. But would it have been better, that Lord North should have coalesced with Lord Shelburne? or that the latter should have again united with Mr. Fox, whom he had formerly abandoned? The opinions, the political connections, the personal altercation, the reciprocal expressions of resentment or of contempt, which appeared to stand in the way of an union
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between Lord Shelburne and Lord North, were at least as conspicuous as any circumstances of a similar nature which had occurred betwixt the latter and Mr. Fox. Was the character of Lord Shelburne such, as to create a firmer reliance upon his professions? Had he appeared less active and zealous, in declaiming against the influence of the Crown, or in turning out of office the supporters of the American war? Yet there is hardly any man so simple as not to be firmly persuaded, that if Lord North had been willing to coalesce with Lord Sheburne, he would have been received with open arms, and this coalition would have been highly extolled, and zealously defended, by all the friends and connections of that party, who now endeavour to represent the coalition with Mr. Fox in the most odious colours.

But the India Bill, brought in by Mr. Fox, is the great circumstance which has given offence to a numerous and powerful description of people, and which has excited them to move Heaven and Earth in order to overturn a Ministry, from which they dreaded the accomplishment of a measure that is so obnoxious to them.

The disorders that have prevailed in the government of India are of such a nature, as cannot fail to awaken the compassion and the indignation of every man who has perused the authentic accounts of them, and whose heart is not contracted and hardened

hardened by the strong, and often irresistible principle of self-interest. It is a melancholly prospect, to behold that fertile and extensive country, the seat of an ancient system of manners and of knowledge, the residence of thirty millions of inhabitants, wasted and depopulated without mercy, and subjected to all the miseries that can be conceived to arise from the lawless fury and rapacity of an undisciplined, and ill regulated body of mercenaries, directed and goaded on, by the unremitting and unsatiable avarice of a set of merchants, or servants of merchants, in whom, by long habit, every other feeling but that of avarice seems to be totally extinct. It must be impossible, one should think, for any member of the British Legislature to reflect, that he is, in some measure, accessory to these depredations and enormities, without experiencing very painful sensations, and without being disposed to exert himself in putting a stop to those evils. In the beginning of the present session, there was accordingly an universal cry for a strong and efficient bill, in order to correct the disorders, and to regulate the future government of India. No palliatives, it was said, by the present Minister, then in opposition, would be sufficient; and nothing less was requisite, than a complete system of regulations, such as would operate a radical cure.

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But when these were the general sentiments expressed in Parliament, and throughout the nation, the East-India Company were meditating schemes of a very different nature ; and nothing could be farther from their thoughts, than to submit to those intended innovations. In order to form an idea of the motives and principles, by which their conduct, in this respect, was directed, you will please to recollect, that the Proprietors of the India Company are not to be considered merely in the light of a society of merchants, depending for their support upon the regular profits of the India trade. The regular and fair profits of that trade are now, by neglect and mismanagement, reduced to a rate which is below the attention of a great mercantile Company. The emoluments derived from our intercourse with that part of the world, are chiefly such as arise from depredation ; and the *form of trade*, which is still kept up with the country, is little more than the mode of remitting the spoils which have been amassed by illegal violence. The Proprietors of India Stock at home are, of course, the real dependants of their nominal servants abroad. The dividends of the former depending chiefly upon the successful rapacity of the latter, both of them are excited by the strongest motives of interest, to strain every nerve in promoting their common views. A great part of the India Proprietors have, in fact, purchased

purchased their stock for no other purpose, than to support the interest of the particular servants of the Company abroad, with whom they are connected. To such Proprietors, any effectual measure for regulating the government of India, must appear in the light of a proposal for draining the sources of all their wealth, as well as for annihilating their political connections; and a tame acquiescence in such a measure can as little be expected from them, as it can be expected from the servants of the Company abroad, who are fattening upon the spoils of India, and acquiring immense fortunes, by which, when imported into this country, they shall afterwards be enabled to smother any enquiry into their most atrocious misdeeds.

In these circumstances, it occasions no surprise, that the India Bill presented to Parliament by Mr. Fox, however well it might be calculated for repressing these disorders, was in the highest degree offensive and alarming to the India Company. The more it was likely to be effectual in promoting so salutary a purpose, the alarm which it excited became necessarily so much the greater. The utmost opposition, therefore, was made to it in every stage of its progress, by that numerous and powerful body of men; and the most outrageous and bitter invectives were poured out against it. When we consider, however, the

different arguments which have been stated in the course of this opposition, we find that they are altogether of a secondary nature; that they relate, not to the tendency of the bill, with regard to its main purpose, the government of India, (for in this respect it appears to be unexceptionable) but to the effects of it upon the state of the Company, and of the government at home. In this view, it has been represented as violating the *Chartered Rights* of the India Company, and as injurious to the *Royal Prerogative*.

As to the violation of the *Chartered Rights* of the Company, I can hardly persuade myself that the terrors which have been held out by so many people, and displayed with so much parade, are to be considered as real. The danger of trading companies, and to corporations in general, which some people appear to apprehend from the interference of government in regulating the affairs of this Company, on such an extraordinary emergency, I can regard in no other light than that of a mere bug-bear.

I must confess, indeed, that the reason, which I have sometimes met with in conversation, for interfering in the affairs of the Company, that, by their bad behaviour, they have forfeited their rights, does not appear to me a satisfactory one. It does not appear that a corporation can justly
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be deprived of its rights, as a punishment for the offences committed by its managers.

But, surely, it will not be disputed, that the good of the nation, and the general interest of society, may afford a sufficient reason for restraining and modifying the rights of any individual, as well as of any corporation whatever. That the state has a right of regulating the property of all its members, with a view to the public advantage, has been universally admitted. It has never been doubted that Parliament may force a man to sell his ground for the purpose of making a turnpike road. The law by which heritable jurisdictions in Scotland were abolished, upon giving a pecuniary recompence to the persons thus deprived of their rights, has never been arraigned, as contrary either to justice, or to sound policy. Even the Sovereign of the Isle of Man was, without any complaint, obliged, from considerations of public utility, to surrender his regal authority, and to accept of a reasonable compensation. The privileges of the India Company will not surely be looked upon as more sacred than the common rights of property. They are privileges derived merely from the positive interposition of the Legislature; and the establishment of them was, in fact, an encroachment upon the rights belonging to the other members of the community; an encroach-

ment which nothing but the consideration of great public utility could justify. At the same time it ought to be remembered, that the pecuniary interest of the Company, so far as it arises from a fair trade, in consequence of their exclusive privileges, would not, in any degree, have been hurt by the bill; but would, on the contrary, have been promoted, by turning the general attention from depredation to the ordinary profits of commerce. Nothing more was intended, than to regulate the trade and government of India, in a manner consistent with the interest of Great Britain, with the principles of humanity, and with the unalienable rights of mankind.

2. As to what is pretended that the system of regulation proposed by Mr. Fox would have created a fourth estate independant of the Crown, you will recollect that this pretence appeared to have little weight with any person, during the early stages of the bill, though it was afterwards assumed with greater confidence, in order to serve a temporary purpose. The circumstance of the *Directors* of the Company being appointed by Parliament, instead of being appointed by the King, cannot be thought to be of great moment, when it is considered, that, in either case, they would have been really suggested by the Minister. Neither would their being established for a *certain period*, a circumstance necessary to give energy
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and vigour to their proceedings, render them independant of the Crown ; since by the regulation proposed, they were to have been removeable by an address from either House of Parliament ; and that the Crown might at pleasure procure such an address, at least from the House of Lords, no person who has been attentive to recent transactions will be disposed to question.

It has indeed been argued, that, as the appointment of those Directors was to proceed from the late Ministry, their friends would of course retain the government of India, independant of any future changes of Administration, and the Crown would thus find itself hampered and limited in the nomination of its servants. This argument goes upon the supposition, that persons who have obtained the independant possession of an office will afterwards retain a constant disposition to serve those individuals to whom they are indebted for their preferment. It supposes that they will be so corrupted, as to make their public conduct subservient to the private views of a party, and so virtuous, as to prefer the interest of their benefactor to their own, whenever the former is brought in competition with the latter. How far this supposition is consistent, or how far it agrees with experience, I leave you to determine. How far the principle of private friendship is likely to extend in politics, I shall not take upon me to calculate.

calculate. But this I think may be said without offence: That supposing a set of Directors appointed upon the plan above-mentioned, their own interest would concur with that of the public, in requiring that they should maintain a good correspondence with any set of Ministers who might hereafter be established; and I see no reason to apprehend that they would be under much temptation to sacrifice those important objects to the mere punctilio of gratitude, by the display of a romantic attachment to their old benefactors*.

In all these articles which have been objected to the last Ministry, we have an opportunity of comparing their conduct with that of the present Administration. Both have approved of the Receipt Tax; but the difference lies in this, that Lord John Cavendish, both when he was in office and out of it, had the manliness to stand forth as the avowed supporter of the measure, while his successor in office thought it necessary to sculk and shuffle, in order to avoid an explanation of his sentiments, and permitted his emissaries to load the opposite party with the odium of a measure which he himself secretly approved of. Both have produced an India Bill; but the principle which they adopted in their several bills was very diffe-

* I would by no means however be thought to degrade the standard of political gratitude so much, as to refer you to the noted examples of Mr. R——n or Sir C——l W——y,

rent. Mr. Fox appears to have proceeded upon the principle of public utility, and endeavoured to produce an effectual system of regulation. Mr. Pitt seems to have embraced the expedient of temporising, and to have no farther view than of extricating himself from the present embarrassment. He supported his bill chiefly by the *consent* of the India Company, who, as might be easily supposed, were prevailed upon to prefer that system which had the least tendency to restrain the conduct of their servants. What proportion of the India Proprietors concurred in giving this consent, it is needless to enquire; for surely, nothing can be more evident, than that no particular members of the Company had a right, by a voluntary surrender, to give up the privileges belonging to the corporation. This is a point of law that appears to have been sufficiently understood as far back as the reign of Charles the Second, when the boroughs were so much misled to resign their privileges to the Crown, for the purposes of promoting the despotical views of the Court.

Lastly, We may turn our attention to the present *coalition* of individuals, by whom the conduct of Lord North and Mr. Fox, in this respect, has been so much arraigned. It is not a little remarkable that Gentlemen, who have complained of this measure in others, should have set an example

ample of so singular a conjunction in themselves. Is it possible for the whole compass of nature to collect a more heterogeneous mass of jarring elements, than go to the political composition of what the poverty of our language forces me to call the present Ministry. And yet they would make us expect that their union is to be productive of the public salvation. They have even modestly told us, that, from mere motives of public spirit, they could not think of resigning. When we see Lord T——w united with Lord S——y, and Mr. D——s in a strict league with Mr. P——t, we may look for something extraordinary indeed——we may expect a new progeny upon the face of the earth—And perhaps it is reasonable to conclude, that the happy time is not far off, when the wolf shall dandle the kid, and the sucking child shall put its hand upon the den of the cockatrice.

Jam redeat virgo, redeant Saturnia regna—

I am, &c.

L E T T E R

L E T T E R II.

MR. Fox's India Bill, mentioned in my last Letter, how offensive soever it was to the India Company, and whatever clamour it might have excited throughout the nation, would not, in all probability, have effected a change of ministry, had it not been for the concurrence of another circumstance, to which I must now beg leave to call your attention.

That in Great Britain the influence of the Crown has, for a long time, been gradually encreasing, and this, from the natural course of things, independant of the designs of any particular ministry, is the opinion, you know, of many persons; and for my part, I cannot help thinking that it is well founded. There are two circumstances, respecting the state of the nation in this particular, which I shall take the liberty of submitting to your consideration.

1. The prodigious increase of the Crown revenue, so far as it has arisen from an increase of the number of people, by whom that revenue is supplied, must infallibly, I imagine, have extended the influence of the Crown. Suppose

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that a State is so small as to contain only fifty thousand inhabitants, each of whom can afford, in taxes to government, to pay at an average twenty shillings; the revenue under the management of the chief magistrate, would, in such a case, be the source of very little authority. It would probably render him very little richer than several of his most opulent subjects; and as the support of his dignity would require that he should live at more expence than they, he could not be expected to have any surplus remaining, to maintain either a military establishment, or a numerous train of civil officers. If we suppose a nation so large as to contain five hundred thousand free inhabitants, and paying taxes in the same proportion, the sovereign, possessing a revenue of 500,000*l.* sterling would, by the management thereof, be raised to proportionably greater consideration and importance. As his income might possibly be ten times greater than that of any of his subjects, he might, after defraying the necessary expence of his household, be in a condition to bestow a considerable sum for the mere purpose of creating dependance. He might maintain a small body of troops, to serve as a kind of body guard; and he might have a variety of servants and retainers in the several departments of government. The authority of such a Prince, however, could never be very great.

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He could never afford to hire an army that would be able to subdue the inhabitants, nor to gain such a body of dependants as would be sufficient to counteract those combinations among his subjects, to which his tyranny might easily give occasion.

But if a State, instead of containing five hundred thousand, were to contain twenty millions of inhabitants, contributing at the same rate to the public revenue, it would be scarcely possible to prevent the Sovereign, who had thus the management and disposal of the annual sum of twenty millions, from establishing an absolute authority. He could afford to maintain, and the state of the kingdom would probably give him a pretext for maintaining, two or three hundred thousand regular troops; an army that would be master of the lives and fortunes of all his subjects. The multitude of officers necessary for collecting this revenue the great variety of magistrates requisite for preventing disorders in so extensive a country, the great number of clergy, together with such as were employed at the public expence for the instruction of youth, the numerous pensioners and placemen, unavoidable in so large an empire, and whom the Sovereign would be in a condition to support; not to mention the still greater number of expectants in each of these departments: all these, having a constant interest to attach themselves to the fortunes of the Crown, would form such a powerful body

of auxiliaries, as, with their several connections, would produce an implicit submission to every measure which the Monarch might be disposed to enforce. In opposition to the wealth in the hands of the Crown, the property that could be accumulated by any number of individuals, united occasionally for the defence of their privileges, would be little more than a drop in the bucket.

The wonderful increase of the public revenue of Britain, since the time of the Revolution, though partly owing to the increasing wealth of the inhabitants, is at the same time derived, in a good measure, from the extension of her dominions, and from the greater number of people, who, in some shape or other, are subjected to the payment of her taxes. The loss of America is to be considered, no doubt, as, in this respect, a great diminution of British subjects; since the inhabitants of that country, from our commercial intercourse with them, and by the monopoly which we enjoyed, were in reality contributors to our taxes. But notwithstanding the reduction of the British empire in that quarter, there can be no doubt, if we consider its dependancies in other parts of the globe, and more particularly the subjugation of India, that it has, upon the whole, been greatly augmented since the period above-mentioned; and the natural consequences of this augmentation, by throwing greater weight into the scale of the executive

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tive power, must be obvious upon the slightest reflection.

2. Another circumstance, which of late has greatly contributed to increase the power of the Crown, is the effect of commerce, and of that opulence which is derived from it, in breaking down the old family connections, and in promoting a spirit of venality and corruption.

In those times which immediately succeeded the Revolution, the nobility and great landed proprietors, though they had long been stript of that dangerous authority, which had produced a prevalence of aristocracy in the early periods of our government, were still possessed of so much influence, as enabled them to collect and retain a number of faithful adherents, in support of every measure in which they were warmly engaged. It was therefore not difficult, in many cases, to form a powerful opposition, the members of which were not easily seduced by the Court, to desert the standard of their respective leaders. But the greater advancement of trade has, in a good measure, destroyed this hereditary influence, and has raised up to wealth and consideration, a set of new men, without connections, and without any principle of union, but that which is directed by a regard to their own interest. Thus the great body of the people, though they have acquired, perhaps, more independance, and a higher spirit of liberty. are
become

become less capable of prosecuting any joint measures for the support of their privileges. They are like an army without subordination or discipline, incapable of availing themselves of their own strength, and easily put into disorder, or cut in pieces, by the superior skill of the enemy. Among a number of individuals, every one of which is prosecuting his own private views, the opportunities given to Ministry of breaking every opposition, by gaining those persons whose abilities or wealth have rendered them formidable, may easily be conceived. In confirmation of what has now been advanced, you will observe that the late elections have, in several places, exhibited a sort of triumph of the inhabitants of towns, and of the smaller gentry, in opposition to what is usually denominated the great landed interest of the country.

To this circumstance, I am afraid, we may add, the progress of that mercenary spirit, which is the natural consequence of great riches, acquired by gainful employments, and of that necessitous condition which is often produced by habits of dissipation and extravagance. In former times, those who aspired to political consideration were generally actuated by ambition, at least, if not by motives of public virtue, and regarded pecuniary considerations as of inferior value. They were excited by their birth, by their education, and by

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a consciousness of their own dignity, to maintain a consistency of conduct. They were often tenacious of party principles, of their ancient connections, and even of their own particular humours, opinions, and prejudices. How much the state of the country has been changing in this respect, it would be superfluous to remark. Your own observation will be sufficient to convince you how universally the objects of ambition have been made subservient to the sordid pursuits of avarice, and with what steady sagacity the desire of gain is capable of persevering on the trail even of petty emolument. It would be an invidious task to point at any recent occurrences, in order to show how far the prospect of Court favour is capable of altering public conduct, and of new modelling public opinions. I only mean to take notice of the advantages, which are thus obtained by Administration, for bearing down every obstacle before it, and in carrying all its views into execution.

In a situation where the influence of the Crown is gradually advancing, from the natural course of things, we need not be surprised that many individuals should find their account in professing a warm zeal to promote its farther advancement; and should be willing to assist in any measures that might be suggested for that purpose. It is not necessary to inform you that the promoting designs of this nature has been the uniform system
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of the present reign. We have too much reason to believe that there are persons who look upon the prerogative as too limited in this kingdom; and who think that there is no good reason, why it should not be equally extended as in France, or in most of the other European monarchies. These opinions have been sometimes declared with sufficient openness; though, on other occasions, it is believed, they have been insinuated in a more secret manner, in places where the poison was most likely to be attended with fatal consequences. If the American war had been successful, there can be no doubt that, by the great additional influence that would have resulted to the Crown from the government of that country, the schemes of those gentlemen would, in a short time, and probably without much alarm or noise, have been fully accomplished. I am far from supposing, however, that every person who concurred in supporting the American war, or even some of those who took a principal share in it, had any the most remote concern in those designs. The truth is, the American war was supported by a sort of delirium, which appears to have pervaded all ranks of men; and it is only when we have recovered our senses, and look back upon it from some distance, that we have become sensible of the folly of our conduct. The issue of that war, however, was not more favourable to the natural rights of mankind, than

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it was fortunate for the liberty of this kingdom. It occasioned a total overthrow of those political measures which had been prosecuted for some time, and it was the opinion of many that these would never be revived. For my own part, I acknowledge that I was led to entertain such hopes. But that these were ill-founded, the event soon demonstrated. The Ministry, which was formed upon Lord North's resignation, had not been many months in office, before it became visible that a powerful division of the C—b—t had been induced to desert the principles upon which they had risen to popular favour, and to study the advancement of their own private interest, by fighting under the banner of prerogative. By the injudicious treaty of peace which they were constrained to patch up in a hurry, these new adherents of the Crown were again defeated, and were left in disappointment and disgrace. It is not surprising that they discovered on this occasion the utmost virulence against the coalition ; to which their mortification was principally owing. Nothing now remained for the party, but to call in their forces, and to lie in wait for some future opportunity of renewing their attack ; and this, as we have seen already, was presented to them, by Mr. Fox's India Bill in the following session of Parliament. It seems to have been at first expected, that this bill, from the noise that was made

about its tendency to *increase* the power of the Crown, would be rejected in the House of Commons ; from which the Ministry would of course be overturned. But this having failed, a more desperate measure became necessary ; and the desired event was with some difficulty produced, by the unconstitutional interference of the Crown in the House of Peers.

Even after the success of this measure, a new Herculean labour was still behind, in order to reap any benefit from the past. It was necessary to gain over, from the last ministry, the greatest majority in the House of Commons, which had ever, perhaps, supported any administration, in a question of such difficulty and importance. For accomplishing this purpose, two resolutions were taken ; the nature and tendency of which deserved to be examined with the utmost attention. The first was to endeavour, by every artifice, to excite, throughout the nation, a clamour against the former ministry, and to procure addresses in favour of the late change of administration. The second, intended as a supplement to the former, was to dissolve the Parliament.

With regard to the first of these measures, I shall not dispute that cases may occur which are sufficient to justify an appeal, from the determinations of the House of Commons, to the opinion of their Constituents, or of the nation at large. As all
government

government is ultimately derived from the people, so it must be understood that the people have a right to controul the exercise of those powers which they have committed to certain magistrates, or to certain classes and orders of men. But, on the other hand, it will certainly be admitted by every reasonable person, that these ultimate appeals to the people ought never to be made but upon very extraordinary occasions, nor without the most urgent necessity. The most important powers in the State are committed to the several branches of Parliament; and the Constitution knows no other way, but through them, of exercising those powers. Whenever Parliament is prevented from that exercise, there is an immediate suspension of all government. It is the duty of every member of Parliament to exercise the powers committed to him, according to his best judgment, and according to his conscience.—Though he ought, no doubt, to have his mind open to information from every quarter, and in particular to listen to the voice of his constituents, as that of men entitled to great deference and respect; yet the duty which he owes to the public, requires that he should be ultimately directed by his own opinion. A member of the House of Commons is not the representative merely of the borough or county by which he is chosen; he is the representative of the whole nation; and the voice of every county or borough in the kingdom is equally

entitled to his regard. The powers of government are committed to him, by the constitution, for the very purpose of avoiding that confusion, that ignorance, that inconsistency, that endless delay, which would infallibly render the nation incapable of executing the most common business, if the people were to assemble and take into their own hands the regulation of public measures.

But if an appeal to the people ought, in all cases, to be made with extreme caution, it is, most especially, of a dangerous tendency when made upon the part of the Crown. It will not escape your observation, that the late application to the people for procuring addresses, in favour of Administration, and against the declared sense of a great majority in the House of Commons, is perhaps the first instance of the kind that occurs in our history. The complaints of the people, in former times, have been excited by a supposed union of Parliament with Ministry, and have proceeded from a jealousy that the national representatives were too much under the direction of the Court. If ever there happens to be just ground for such an apprehension, if ever Parliament should become so corrupted as to betray the rights of the people to the interest of the Crown, the whole nation must be convinced that there is a necessity for complaining. But there is no great danger that complaints, upon that account, will ever become

come too frequent, or that popular clamour will ever arise to any great pitch without sufficient cause ; for in such a case, the complaints of the people will be checked and counteracted both by the operations in Court influence, and by that of the leading men in the nation.

The case is widely different, when the House of Commons and the Crown are at variance, and when the former is maintaining a point of privilege, in opposition to a claim of prerogative by the latter. There it may happen that the clamours of the people should be excited by mere artifice, and without any just foundation.

The danger of admitting the popular interference, when procured in such a manner, must be obvious. In the course of any important debate in the House of Commons, the weaker party is tempted to lay hold of every circumstance calculated to support a losing cause. By joining their influence to that of the Crown, by application to those boroughs, or parts of the country where they have the most immediate interest, and by soliciting that part of the inhabitants who happen to favour their own views, it will be no difficult matter to procure addresses, which, to those at a distance, may appear to speak the language of the people. If an experiment of this kind meets with encouragement in one instance, the example is likely to be followed in others ; and different fac-
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tions will be inclined in their turn, to support their own interest, by resorting to the same expedient. The Crown was formerly accustomed to carry on the great national business, by procuring a majority in Parliament. That is, doubtless, a method still. But another method will now be introduced, the peculiar invention of the present times; that of procuring a *minority*, by whose assistance, supported by such addresses as can be obtained, the same end may probably be accomplished. When the Crown is thus doubly armed, it must be a strong and obstinate majority, indeed, that is capable of resisting the efforts of prerogative.

But the dissolution of Parliament was the great resource of the present Ministry, from which they promised themselves the final accomplishment of their purposes. From the time that they came into office, there can be no doubt that this measure was resolved upon, in case it should be found necessary; but it was delayed for some time, and kept in reserve, for several very obvious reasons. It was thought adviseable to try every other expedient for procuring a majority in Parliament, before they hazarded a measure of such a desperate nature. In the mean time every art was practised, and every engine of corruption was employed, in order to gain or to intimidate those persons who disapproved of their late proceedings. It was necessary, besides, that matters
should

should be put into a proper train for the ensuing elections. Considering the state of the Constitution, it required a course of proper evacuations, and alteratives, to prepare it for that violent operation which it was about to undergo. Some little time was necessary for this purpose ; and in order that the other party might be prevented from likewise availing themselves of this interval, it was requisite that they should be kept in suspense, with respect to the future dissolution. Intimation was accordingly given by the friends of the Minister, that he would not advise the dissolution of Parliament ; an answer, confirming the same idea with regard to the intention of Government, was delivered from the throne ; the Minister afterwards gave more positive assurances to the same effect ; and, notwithstanding the earnest and diligent canvassing of ministerial candidates throughout the kingdom, the nation in general remained for several months in a state of uncertainty, concerning the final intention of Administration. Thus, when the stroke was at last given, which put an end to that Parliament, the Ministry had already done every thing in their power to secure the character and complexion of its successor.

That the power of dissolving Parliament is a branch of the King's prerogative is indisputable ; though I believe, on the other hand, it will be
acknowledged,

acknowledged, that an intention to dissolve Parliament, merely because the King could not procure a majority in the House of Commons, has not been harboured by any English monarch from the Revolution to the present time. The right of calling the great national council was originally bestowed upon the chief executive officer, because, from his situation, he was the fittest person to judge when there was occasion for its deliberations; and he had, of course, the right of dissolving that assembly; which was nothing more, than the dispensing with its farther attendance. It was always understood, however, to be the duty of the Sovereign to call meetings of Parliament as often as the business of the nation required it; and it was never supposed that he would dismiss a Parliament, or refuse to call that assembly, with a view of withholding public measures from its consideration, or of diverting the exercise of its powers into a different channel. — The returning officer of a county, or of a borough, is entrusted, by the Constitution, with the power of returning the members of the House of Commons for his district; but he is guilty of a manifest violation of his duty, if, in order to serve a job, he returns those persons, who, according to his best judgment, have not a majority of the legal electors. The branch of prerogative now under consideration must be viewed in the same light;

light; and the Ministry are responsible, if it has been perverted to any purposes different from those for which it was originally bestowed.

That it has been so perverted, however, must be evident to the whole nation. Will any man pretend to say that the last Parliament was dissolved, from the want of business requiring its determination? Is there any man so hardy as to affirm, that there were not measures of the highest national importance pressing forward to the deliberation of Parliament, and which could not be delayed, without extreme inconvenience, and even without the hazard of a public convulsion. Did the House of Commons shew any reluctance to carry on the national business; or did they not, on the contrary, demonstrate the strongest determination, in short, to facilitate and promote every measure that might establish public credit, and provide the necessary remedies for the various exigencies of the State? Is there any man, who does not believe that the last Parliament was dissolved "merely because the Ministry could not otherwise obtain a majority in the late House of Commons," and for no other purpose than that of procuring, by ministerial influence, a greater number of friends in the present one? Will it be seriously maintained, that a dissolution of Parliament from such motives, and for such a purpose, is consistent with the great ends for which the

Crown was entrusted with this discretionary power?

The consequences, at the same time, of this measure appear to be pregnant with so much mischief, as must excite the most painful apprehension in every man who is anxious to preserve our happy Constitution.

To the Members of the House of Commons a dissolution of Parliament, at a time when the period of its natural expiration is at a considerable distance, must always be a serious matter. It was formerly the universal belief that our representatives, however they might be tempted by the prospect of Court favour, were in no danger of suffering any hardship from the displeasure of the Crown. This point was thought to be absolutely established at the Revolution, when it was provided, that no person should be called in question in any other place for his opinions delivered in Parliament. But we must now be content to receive a different doctrine. We have now an example set before us, that the House of Commons may be subjected to a very considerable punishment, if ever they shall persist in measures which are disagreeable to the Crown; they may be put to the expence of a new election, as well as incur the hazard of losing their seats: and this punishment may be repeated as long as their obduracy continues. Without any disparagement to
that

that House, for which I entertain the highest respect, it will require an uncommon exertion of public spirit in its members, to preserve their steadiness on such occasions, and to maintain their privileges, in opposition to the influence of the Crown, when backed by the terrors of an immediate dissolution. It will require, if possible, still greater virtue in their constituents, and in the nation at large, to support those members who have rendered themselves obnoxious to the Court, and notwithstanding the whole weight of the Treasury, and the various means of seduction, and of delusion in the hands of Ministry and their numerous adherents, to return them once more into Parliament. Such virtue, I am afraid, can hardly be expected; and the effect of a dissolution, at least after one or two examples, will be such as every Englishman, who considers the matter with attention, must tremble to think of.

There are many well meaning people who seem to think, that though a dissolution of Parliament has been put in practice in the present case, it will not be extended to future occasions. But I cannot see the least colour for such an opinion. Will not the same motives which have induced the Crown to hazard such a step at present, produce a second experiment of the same kind, whenever there is a necessity for it, and whenever there

is any probability that it will be successful? Will not every Ministry, in their own case, be judges of this necessity; and be disposed to think, that the accomplishment of the particular measures in which they are engaged, together with the preservation of their places, are sufficient reasons for threatening a dissolution of Parliament, and even for putting their threats in execution? But there is ground to believe, that this latter step will, in a short time, become superfluous. It is reasonable to suppose that the same members, who, by repeated struggles, have found themselves unable to keep their seats, without ruining their fortunes, will at length be disposed to quit the contest, and retire into a private situation. There can be little doubt, that the most resolute perseverance will be finally subdued; and that the mere mention of dissolution will, in the end, be sufficient to overawe the firmest minds, and to produce an universal and implicit obedience.

You will easily see that the Crown is thus likely to acquire what alone was wanting to establish an absolute and unlimited authority. It was formerly understood that the ordinary business of Parliament was pretty uniformly conducted by ministry; but we always expected that, in extraordinary cases, the House of Commons, at least, would be able to make a stand, and give a check to such measures as were extremely improper. We
must

must now, I suspect, if we have not virtue to resist the establishment of this system, bid farewell to these expectations. By the arbitrary exertion of prerogative, in the dissolution of Parliament, the House of Commons, it is evident, will be rendered of no more consequence in the government, than a mere Parliament of Paris, commanded by the King, whenever there is occasion, to register the royal edicts.

I beg leave to add, that in such a state, our preserving the forms of liberty, will only aggravate our misfortune. Our government will not only become an absolute monarchy, but probably an absolute monarchy of the very worst kind that can be established in a civilized and polished nation. In France, where the Legislative, as well as the executive power, is openly and directly exercised by the King, there is commonly little danger from the abuses of his prerogative; because the sovereign and his ministers are, in character and reputation at least, responsible to the public. But whenever it happens, in any country, that the great powers of government are exercised *apparently* by a national council, but *really* and truly by the Crown, the King and his Ministers must be under no such restraint; but will be encouraged to practise measures of which they would otherwise be ashamed, by the consideration that they are screened from the odium and resentment

ment which their conduct is likely to excite. In a word the secret, and disguised exercise of arbitrary power, as it is more likely to arise in this country, so it is of a much more dangerous and pernicious tendency than that which is open and avowed.—

Such is the melancholly view, which I am sorry a regard to truth obliges me to lay before you, when you are just going to be initiated in public business. You are come to examine the result of that experiment which has been made upon the nation, and to discover whether it has been made with success, and with safety to those persons who have had the direction of it. Upon the behaviour of this Parliament, and probably of this very session, the fate of our government will depend. If the House of Commons shall be disposed to vindicate their privileges, and to show a proper resentment of the late measures respecting the dissolution of Parliament, there may be still a prospect that the dangerous wound, which has been given to the Constitution, may be healed. If, on the contrary, they approve of those proceedings, and discover a willingness to support the designs of Ministry, the dispute is over.

“ Venit summa dies, et ineluctabile tempus

“ Dardanice”——

The knowledge I have of your political opinions, and the confidence I entertain that you are much above any private consideration, which a Minister can hold out to you, leave me no doubt of your line of conduct on the present occasion. There is one advantage, however, attending your present situation. To discern your duty is not difficult, though the faithful discharge of it is important. You may also be assured that, whatever misrepresentations are circulated by the tools of prerogative, every honest and intelligent man will approve of your conduct ; and there is the strongest reason to believe that, as the mist of prejudice is every where beginning to be dispelled, the voice of the nation will, in a short time be unanimous in seconding your efforts.

As to particular questions which are likely to come before you, during the present session, I confess that these appear to me of a more or less consequence, according as they have an influence in fixing the great constitutional point which I have mentioned. I have some curiosity to see what sort of India bill will be brought in by the Minister, after the two former bills have been thrown out, and after the public have acquired such full information upon the subject. That it will be an effectual bill, for the protection of that unhappy country, I have not the least expectation. Why should those men seek to restrain the
despotic

despotal government of India, who are seeking to establish a despotism at home? Why should they endanger their places by encountering difficulties at a distance, when the success of their operations depends evidently upon their avoiding any scrutiny of their actions, and lulling the nation in thoughtless security?

The reform of parliamentary representation is another object, which is likely to excite attention and upon which great professions have been made by the Gentleman who is now at the head of the Treasury. He is now in a situation, in which his former promises might easily be fulfilled; and he may expect that the public will not fail to mark his behaviour. If a reform of parliamentary representation was formerly conceived to be expedient, it must now appear absolutely necessary, in order that the House of Commons may be able to maintain its independance, against the arbitrary power of dissolution exercised by the Crown. But, in order that this measure may correspond to the views of the public, and be productive of those advantages which are expected from it, it must be a real and a thorough reformation. It must endeavour to strike at the root of the evil. It must not be confined to the addition of a few county-members; while the numerous representatives, elected by insignificant or by nominal and fictitious boroughs are permitted to remain

remain in their former condition. To expect that the nation, in the present circumstances would be contented with so slight an improvement, is to think that a hungry man will be satisfied with a *mere sugar-plumb*. But it is needless to trouble you with conjecture about particulars which the delay of a few weeks will bring clearly to light. I shall therefore put an end to this long letter by assuring you, that

I am, &c.

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